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ABSTRACT

While learning to quilt, and subsequently seeing quilting everywhere, one teacher decided to make a quilt with the theme of herself as a teacher. Quilts are stories told in visual form, and connections exist between curriculum theory and quilting. During a Master's program, the teacher learned about various curriculum theorists and was amazed at the intertextualities that could be made with quilting. Margorsh Maruyama's three categories (1974), the hierarchist, the mutualist, and the individualist curriculum approach, are all found in quilting circles and bees. Another set of connections exists with D.C. Philips (1995), constructivism and relativism. With Paulo Freire's (1986) concept of banking education, seeing knowledge as the gift the teacher deposits with the student, the connecting in quilting is the paycheck for piecework. Creating a teaching quilt has shown that the funnelling process, hermeneutics, or recursiveness of curriculum is in the currere of a life as a teacher. Some of the difficulties encountered in the construction of a quilt were a clear example of what Maruyama meant when he stated that "people use diverse paradigms without realizing it and are often unwilling or unable to apply different kinds of logic to a problem." The quilt grows as the teacher keeps a running log at school, and this journal is a narrative that helps create the quilt. Perhaps the quilt can be used as a place to revisit, rethink, and reinterpret a personal story and practice of teaching. (Contains seven references.) (CR)

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Quilting as Currere: Me as Teacher

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QUILTING AS CURRERE:

ME AS TEACHER

Background

I remember asking my good friend Linda, an avid quilter, to teach me how. Linda was my mentor teacher during my first year of teaching and has since become a good friend. Under Linda's careful guidance, I became a beginning quilter. She taught me not only how to do the actual machine quilting but the stories of some of the quilt designs, the history of quilting, fabric matching, etc.

I remember her saying to me, now I had started to quilt, I would see quilting everywhere; it would become a part of me. I never really thought much of that at first, but it is true. I look at fabric; I see quilts. I go shopping; I see quilts. I go to the movies; I see quilts.

For example, there is quite a beautiful traditional applique quilt in the movie, Groundhog Day. Someone intentionally picked that kind of quilt because it is one of the most difficult to master and it has a really strong feeling of traditional comfort. Phil, the main character, was trying to achieve both in the movie: he was struggling to master his destiny, to

learn 'to be' and once he accomplished this, he came home.

Because I see quilting everywhere, I decided to make a quilt of me as teacher. After all, quilts are stories told in visual form. Both the quilting process and the blocks I make tell my story as a teacher. After making all the connections in my head between curriculum theory and quilting, I started drawing out blocks. My quilt involved colleagues because I understand that I am dependant on others and I wanted them to be a permanent part of my story.

I took a few days to come up with some designs for blocks based on my currere to date. I encouraged colleagues to sketch important moments of themselves as teachers. Then, I began to sew. The quilt is unfinished. I don't know if it ever will be as long as I am teaching or maybe even as long as I am alive. After all, I'm still learning and to me, that is one of the biggest parts of teaching.

Curricular Connections

During the initial stages of my Master's program, I learned about various curriculum theorists. I was amazed at the intertextualities I made with

quilting. General connections can be made between quilting as a whole and curriculum theory, and specific connections come to me directly though the beginnings of this particular quilt.

Maruyama

The first connections I made came through Margorsh Maruyama (1974). His three categories screamed to me of quilting groups. The hierarchist curriculum approach is found in quilting circles and bees. In these quilting circles, one woman is usually in charge, although the position may rotate depending on the group. This leader determines the quilt pattern and the fabrics used. She is Maruyama's 'expert'. The process is linear and sequential with all the women working on the same quilt in the same order. Stitches are to be the same size in the same pattern; everything is very uniform.

Sometimes these circles will take a mutualist approach. This is where 'crazy' quilts are created. When creating a 'crazy' quilt, the women as a group decide on a theme and each creates her own block representing this theme. The blocks are then joined together and the quilt tells the whole group's story. It is a poly-ocular reflection of the theme. There is a symbiotic relationship in this quilt; no one block can stand alone to tell

the story. Both of these types of circles or bees are evident in the movie/book How to Make An American Quilt by Whitney Otto.

Maruyama's individualist approach also takes place in quilting. Here, a group of women gather and each works her own quilt. When necessary, they consult with each other for new techniques or advice. This was the way Linda taught me. It is also the way that I work with her now when I go to visit, quilt in hand.

Philips

The next set of connections I made came with D. C. Philips (1995) and constructivism and relativism. Constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed, although there is much debate over to what extent. Quilters construct their quilts but here, too, there are levels of construction. The underlining rules, though, seem to be the need to use new fabric and a consistent pattern.

Other than these, the choices are open. One quilter may choose to copy a pattern down to the very fabrics she uses. Another may copy the pattern but change the fabrics. Still another may alter the pattern slightly. A

fourth may create her own pattern entirely. All are appropriate ways to quilt.

The same is true with teaching. I don't teach like my colleague down the hall; we each have our own style and areas of interest so we see the curriculum we are required to teach in different lights. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, it serves to remind us that our students each bring their own knowledge, skills and understanding to the learning situation, too.

Relativism speaks to me of scrap and crazy quilts; anything goes. There are no rules. Patterns are mixed and fabrics are leftovers from various other projects. In a sense, this is constructivism in its simplest form; the quilt is built or created from virtually nothing but that which is around you. The end-product could be a thing of great beauty or extreme ugliness, and this outcome is left totally to chance because of the lack of guidelines to follow. Experienced quilters will create guidelines to avoid getting an ugly finished product. No one wants to put in that kind of work only to be disappointed with the outcome. These guidelines may be as simple as colour choice or block layout, but they do direct the quilt.

Even in quilting, relativism is not something most feel comfortable with. In my teaching, I also feel uncomfortable with complete relativism. I prefer Kieren's (1996) idea of "good enough". The answers here fit the guidelines that have been established and, therefore, they address the question or learning at-hand rather than appearing to come from left field and being 'ugly'.

Freire

A third connection was made through Paulo Freire's (1986) concept of banking education. Some quilts are made by hand in third world countries and sold here dirt cheap. Freire's concept of "banking"sees knowledge as a gift the teacher deposits with the student. In quilting, there is a gift, too -- a paycheque for piecework. Some women and children are paid based on the quantity of quilts they produce, not the quality. Needless to say, they strive to produce more so that they can earn more. The artistry is lost when quilting becomes a fixed assembly with extrinsic motivation rather than a creative pastime with intrinsic motivation. Quilting for creative pleasure would be more in keeping with Freire's revolutionary humanist/libertarian approaches. The quilters work together or apart to

learn and create for its own sake.

General Connections

Specifically, creating my teaching quilt has shown me that the funnelling process, hermeneutics, or recursiveness of curriculum is in the currere of my life as teacher. When I look at the blocks I've designed, I see it. For example the block 'The Quest For Truth' contrasts positivist truth and "good enough" truths. Listening to Tom Kieren (1996) speak, I became aware that, although I wanted to be open to many truths, I am occasionally closed off from them. Examining my life as a teacher to capture its essence in block vignettes allowed me the time to circle back on my practice and become aware of what I am actually doing in class verses what I think I am doing. This reflection mirrors Aoki's (1984) curriculum as planned verses curriculum as lived. Creating the beginnings of my quilt has provided me with traces that influence my future teaching.

Process

I felt that it was most important for me to make the blocks that my colleagues designed first, because I wanted them fresh in my head. People had made comments about their designs that I didn't want to forget.

When I started to sew these blocks together, I encountered my first real difficulty in quilting. The quilts I have made to date have all been what is called piece work. In piece work, the quilter sews the various pieces together to get a block.

Applique uses fine stitches to layer odd-shaped fabrics on top of each other. Being a piece quilter, I assumed I could do this technique as well. This was not the case. I tried to apply my skills as a piece quilter to something that was not connected in any way but, n doing so, I committed dimension reduction. My quilting framework did not change to fit the new situation, a clear example of what Maruyama meant when he stated "people use diverse paradigms without realizing it and are often unwilling or unable to apply different kinds of logic to a problem." (1974)

No wonder I encountered difficulties. And, like Herrigel (1989) when he needed to learn how to breathe in Zen in the Art of Archery, I knew I wasn't doing it right so I sought out my 'master'. Linda taught me that applique and piece quilting were totally different. It is possible to baste blocks on, like I did with my colleague Bill's block. According to the 'Zen of Quilting' just like Herrigel's finger trick, that is cheating. In the end, I

chose to leave Bill's basted because its presence would remind me to seek out knowledge and learn from those who know. Fortunately, Linda did not get angry and refuse her eager student. Rather, she taught me how to use applique techniques. It was a lesson in defining my paradigm before I plunged in head first.

I sewed my colleagues' blocks together and put them on top of three blocks of mine. My blocks represent some of the major things I've learned from curriculum theory. Together with my peers' blocks, they create a polyphony of what we all are and would like to become as teachers.

Like teachers, most quilters are humble people. They gain great pleasure from sharing their visions, stories and techniques. They are not their work but, they are guided in it. When I'm quilting, sometimes I get so caught up in it that I lose track of time, I don't hear the phone, I don't get tired. Sometimes I am one with the quilt, no, sometimes I am the quilt. When I'm piece quilting, I don't even think. It's like I'm not real. Applique will get that way for me; or so Linda tells me. For now, I have to concentrate on it. Somehow that doesn't detract from the enjoyment I get from it. So too with teaching. Be one with the student; no, Be the student.

Applications to BEING Teacher: Both Classroom and Quilt

I followed Maruyama's mutualist approach or Kieren's coemergent enactivist approach to curriculum theory when I included my colleagues as a part of my Being Teacher quilt. This process included asking them to construct their vision of themselves as teacher. Because I didn't want an 'ugly' product, I used the guided imagery as outlined by Norris (1995) to help them envision where they were and where they wished to be as teacher. I also supplied the materials that were not difficult to work with or that screamed in rebellion to what I wanted. I also provided the frame I wanted them to work within, and left them to choose how to do it.

This "good enough" rather than "one way" approach is one I want to continue within this quilt. The quilt has no defined pattern or fabric choice, so it allows for creative freedom as I continue to develop it. That is where I want to be in all things, including my teaching.

The harder part is getting there. One problem is that I live and teach in a means/ends world. The whole sense of Being has nothing to do with the end-product and everything to do with the journey or art of getting there. How do I reconcile the two, especially since I've been existing in one

realm and realize I would like to move to the next?

I can't just plunge into it head first as I did with my failed applique technique. Instead, find someone who knows and ask them to share the way with me. I know the time will come when I am much better at applique than I am now. Perhaps then I may choose to redo the appliques on this quilt so that the overall appearance of the piece will improve. Right now, I feel that, no matter how good I get, I would like to leave it as is. My mistakes are steps I took on my journey towards better quilting. They provide me with an envaluative evaluation. I am a part of my own ongoing evaluation. I can examine where I was at when I first started to applique and compare it to where I will go with it. My quilt is a map of my progress.

This also holds true for me as teacher. I've created designs to record where I've been as teacher and to measure where I am going. Reflecting or revisiting what I have done helps me see that I am progressing toward my goal and allows me to see when I am going forward or backward or when I am stagnating. For me, the quilt is my hermeneutic circle--my unending path as teacher. My teaching quilt will never be finished. I will always

have new stories to record as well as new reflections on old stories, and new goals for my future.

I seem to be at a place in my life and teaching career where I am ready to move to a new realm of Being. By following through on my goal towards creating a more mutualist (Maruyama) or coemergent enactivist (Kieren) classroom, I am achieving a stronger sense of Being. This is a first step towards grounding myself as a teacher. As well, by co-existing with my students and learning along with them, I am relinquishing hierarchist senses of power and ego and gaining a greater state of peace with those around me. I am learning how to share the power of knowledge and material without wielding it like a king's standard. My quilt has become the narrative showing the path I'm taking.

My quilt grows as I keep a running log at school. I write in my journal at the end of every day, reflecting on the day's events and my interaction with my students. When an idea for a new quilt block pops up, I doodle it roughly in my notes and later transcribe it to a cue card. Flashes of creativity seldom escape me. As well, my notes give me a ground for recursive reflection. Through this reflection, I've gained a sense of the

reality of my teaching verses where I want to be. By having something concrete to consider, I can not brush aside or keep repeating my mistakes. I can also keep a record of the things I did right so that I can reflect on them as well, coming to understand why they worked and how I can apply that to other situations. This journal is a narrative that helps me create my quilt. I hope to use my quilt as a place to revisit, rethink and reinterpret my story and practice of teaching.

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